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Commission on the Status of Women
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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child

Statement submitted by International Council of Jewish Women, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* E/CN.6/2007/1.

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Statement

We, the NGO's, below, reaffirm the Beijing Platform of Action where girls won their place on the agenda in Section L. There, governments promised to eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl-child by addressing harmful cultural attitudes and practices, and to promote active participation for girls in their own life decisions. The inclusion of Section L acknowledged that women's advancement would not be sustainable without attention to the rights and dignity of the girl-child.

The theme for CSW51 - The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl-child - is a reminder to governments and civil society of promises made that the safety and protection of the girl-child will be preserved.

Media, advertisements, and popular culture worldwide promote perfect beauty during a time of intense emotional and physical change for the girl-child. It has been shown that girls, even as young as six, are aware of these messages. These stereotypes can create anxiety, lack of self-esteem and loss of confidence, and surely impede development of a healthy self-image. They have been shown to contribute to the rapid increase in dieting and eating disorders. The problem is widespread across the globe, but due to cultural differences, it is not publicly acknowledged.

Girls should be celebrated for who they are and not how they look. These images and standards of beauty contradict good health practices and contribute to negative feelings about physical appearance. The still-malleable girl-child is defining herself and her self-worth by false standards. In too many countries, girls withdraw from normal activities of life because they are troubled about the appearance of their bodies.

The next generation of girl-children must grow up without the pressure and consequences of having to live up to unrealistic and unhealthy beauty ideals. We therefore urge governments and civil society to:

- Initiate grass-roots programs that will help individual girls form a healthy self-image: talk to girls early in life about real beauty; support healthy eating; link women's organizations with schools, youth groups, and community centers to promote discussions on role models, if they are real, and why; educate to achieve independent thinking and a critical view of the media and their messages;

- Encourage schools to develop workshops and mentoring programs for girls to help foster a healthy relationship with their bodies; select role models to surround them with alternative values; connect business with educational institutions to focus on popular culture and the effect it has on the girl child;

- Educate parents on the importance of reinforcing their daughters' confidence;

- Enable girls to be their own advocates for change; to actively plan and run programs for changing images; help girls to build self confidence and develop leadership skills;

- Encourage commercial media interests to promote "real beauty" among "real girls" to prove that beauty comes in different shapes, sizes, and looks; marketing and outreach should portray real and authentic women who don't fit into specific beauty stereotypes;

- Encourage commercial interests to create women's forums to participate in a dialogue and debate about the definition and standards of beauty in society;

- Develop realistic standards for media, advertising and the communication industries.

Just as the struggle for women's rights began with massive consciousness-raising, the issue of self-image must become a topic of public debate. Let us help the girl child stop chasing a mirage and return to a healthy reality.

Note:

Statement endorsed and supported by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council: Anglican Consultative Council, Armenian International Women's Association, Associated Country Women of the World, Gray Panthers, Hadassah — Women's Zionist Organization of America, International Federation for Home Economics, International Federation on Ageing, International Health Awareness Network, International Immigrants Foundation, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation, Perhaps Kids Meeting Kids Can Make a Difference, Soroptimist International and World ORT Union, and by Women's American ORT, a non-governmental organization